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# THE SMALL WOODLAND OWNER *in* EASTERN KENTUCKY-

*his attitudes and environment*



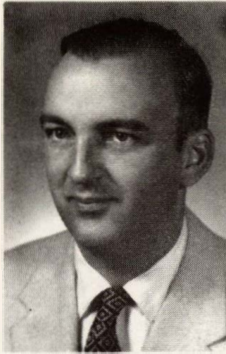
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**THE SMALL WOODLAND  
OWNER *in* EASTERN  
KENTUCKY-**  
*his attitudes and environment*

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The small woodland is one of the major "problems" confronting foresters today. Low productivity and lack of management seem to be much more prevalent on small holdings than on large. Why? The answer to this question lies more with the people, the owners themselves, than with the trees. The first step then in solving the small woodland problem is to find out more about the owners--who they are, how they live, and what they think. A recent survey in eastern Kentucky reveals some of this information about small forest owners in that region.

One hundred and ten forest landowners were interviewed in six separate areas located in two counties of eastern Kentucky. The areas were sufficiently isolated from one another

so that the landowners were not influenced by common leadership or affiliations. Information about owners' age, tenure, occupation, type of ownership, place of residence and how they acquired their land, their attitude toward forestry practices (particularly on their own forest land), and their reaction to a long-term forest management lease arrangement was obtained from the owners themselves. Facts and figures about the economic and social environment in their county were obtained from the County Extension Council. This information was based on the 1954 Agricultural Census, the local A. C. P. files, S. C. S. files, County Agent files, courthouse records, school records, and observations of extension personnel.

### Income

This is a land of near poverty for most families. Seventy-five percent have incomes of less than \$2,000 a year, compared with a national average family income of about \$5,000. Seventy percent of the people over 65 years old are on public assistance rolls, as are 10 percent of the children under 15 years old.

### Family Living

Living conditions and facilities are well below modern standards. Most houses are old and poorly constructed. Nearly half were built before 1920. While 80 percent have electricity, only 16 percent have running water, 10 percent have telephones and only 5 percent have inside bath facilities. Fifteen percent of the farms are on paved roads and in 1954 only 20 percent had tractors, 25 percent had trucks, and 35 to 40 percent had automobiles. Some mountain counties have no doctor, although the two in question have one doctor for every 1,500 to 2,000 people. Home economics extension personnel report a general lack of knowledge in buying and selecting clothing and in selecting and operating labor-saving devices.



### Education

While the people appear to have a high degree of native ability and speak well, there is considerable illiteracy among adults. Communities strive to improve the younger people by improving school facilities. Median schooling among adults 25 years and older is 7th grade.

### Local Opportunities

Over the past 20 years there have been major out-migrations from eastern Kentucky to major industrial areas in the North. From 20 to 30 percent of the population in these two counties left from 1940 to 1950 and it is expected that the next census will show the trend continuing. This is explained by the lack of opportunities for young people to make a living. In one county for example from 100 to 120 boys will become 18 years old each year from 1959 to 1965 and hence will officially enter the labor force. In contrast, only an estimated 5 farming jobs and 10 industrial jobs will be available each year.

### Age and Tenure

Ninety percent of the owners in this study were farmers. One in four was over 60 years old and nearly half were over 50 years old. Half of the owners had owned their property less than 15 years. The properties themselves were 60 percent woodland and 2 out of 3 are less than 100 acres in size.

In spite of all this--low income and living standard, lack of education, scarcity of jobs, age and tenure of landowners--8 out of 10 woodland owners favored "letting the timber grow" (table 1). But, although 1 in 3 thought that it would be profitable to practice forestry on their woodland, 3 out of 4 had never attempted to do so. Clues to the reasons behind this apparent reluctance to get into the forestry business may be derived from some of the typical comments of the owners

interviewed. Most of these comments reflect some specific factor or factors in the life or background of the individual that influences his attitude toward his forest land.

For example:

Landowners who -

Were getting old yet had short tenure on their land

Had low income and/or too few acres

Were poorly educated

Had moved away but did not sell land

Like to hunt and enjoy woodlands

Commonly said -

"Why should I practice forestry; I'm too old to benefit and the kids all leave the country?"

"I don't have enough woodland to make forestry worthwhile."

"I need all my land for livestock."

"Woodwork takes time which I need for my crops so as to make quick income."

"There ought to be a law against sawmill men skinning woods." (This comment was made repeatedly.)

"I sell lump sum for big trees that are ready to go bad."

"Own farm to come back to."

"I wouldn't own a farm without woodland on it."

Table 1.--Owners' intended use for their woodlands  
(In percent)

Intended use	1st Choice	2nd Choice
Let timber grow	82	14
Graze forest land	12	29
Squirrel hunting ground	0	12
Other uses	6	45
Total	100	100

The owner's attitudes are related to his personal circumstances and environment and because of this his objectives for his forest land often differ from optimum forestry objectives. Improving forest management on these properties then is largely a problem of people and their environment rather than a technical forestry problem. These examples of owner attitudes emphasize the need to reorient forest research and forestry services from forest objectives to owner objectives.

Most important obstacles to forestry were found to be low incomes and poor education. This situation suggests that a first step is to make the owners aware of the income potential of their woodlands so that they will want to practice forestry. Then forest management and forest land use alternatives should be presented to them so they can make individual decisions as to the pattern of woodland development best suited to their needs.

The Central States Forest Experiment Station is headquartered at Columbus, Ohio and maintains major field offices at:

Ames, Iowa (in cooperation with Iowa State University)

Athens, Ohio (in cooperation with Ohio University)

Bedford, Indiana

Berea, Kentucky (in cooperation with Berea College)

Carbondale, Illinois (in cooperation with Southern Illinois University)

Columbia, Missouri (in cooperation with the University of Missouri)